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ABSTRACT

This theme issue of "The Goldfinch" focuses on the main streets in Iowa's past. Residential and business patterns are discussed with an analysis of successes and failures. Efforts of young Iowans involved in preservation of a historic town square in their community are described. Activities, fiction selections, and nonfictional accounts of present and past main streets are included. An article on Main Street life describes the sights and sounds of main street long ago with photographs from earlier days. Another article about changes on main street recounts memories of modernization efforts including electrification in cities, livery stables yielding to parking garages, the new architecture resulting with window shopping, and expansion to shopping malls from the local general store. An article on main street festivals chronicles people's unchanging fascination with parades and celebrations on main street. (EH)

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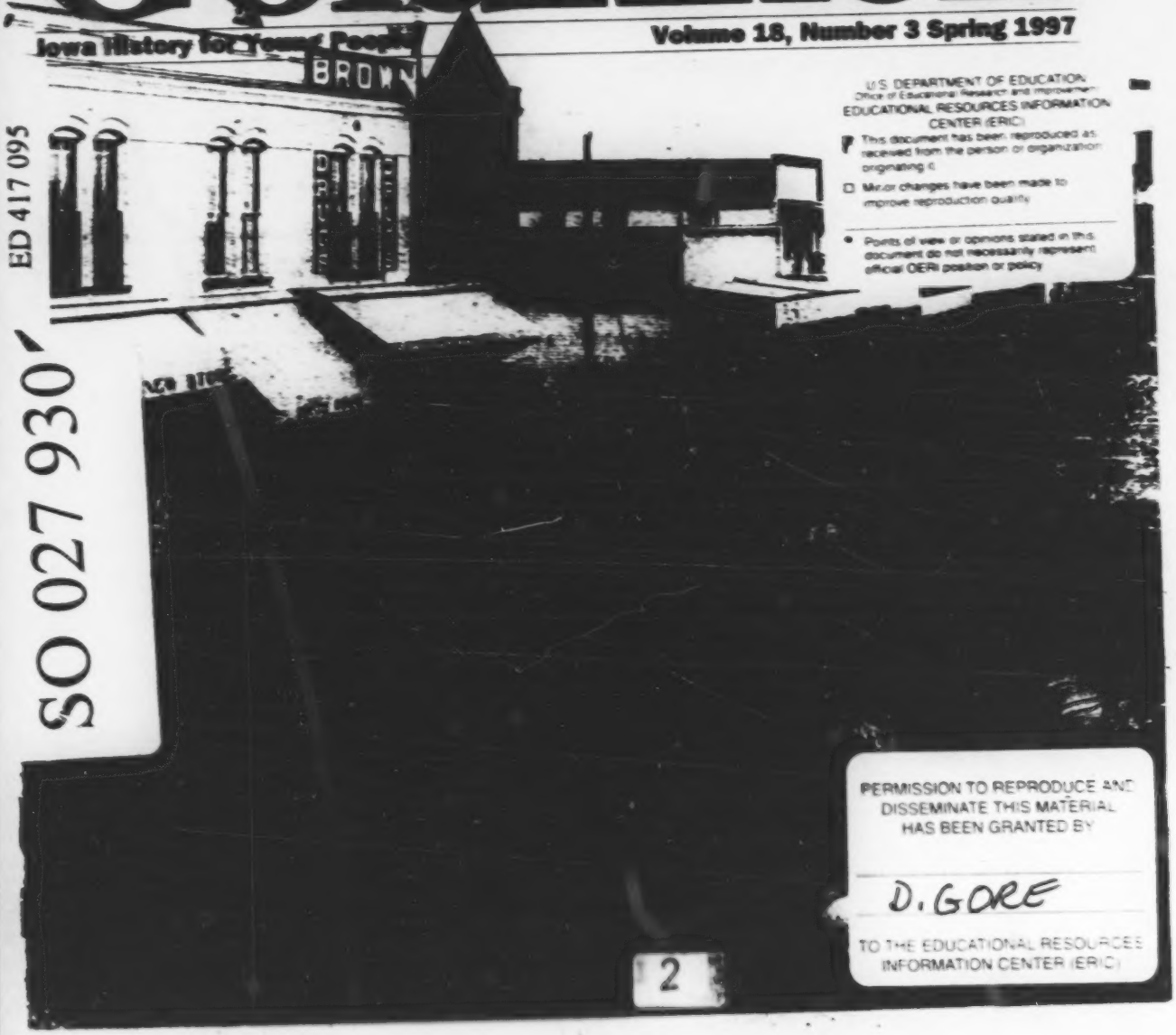
THE Goldfinch

Iowa History for Young People

Volume 18, Number 3 Spring 1997



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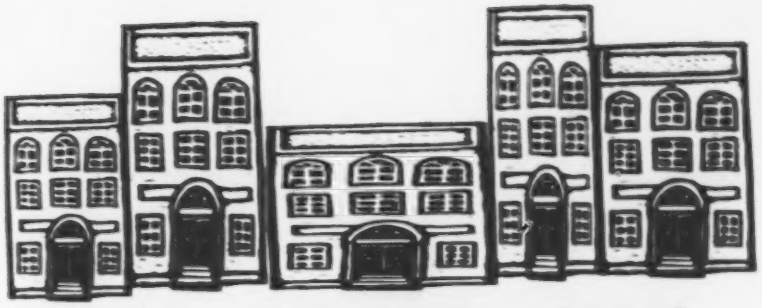

Let's visit main street

Mention historic main street and most Iowans envision a lively street lined with stores and businesses. They picture shoppers and merchants buying, selling, and catching up on the local news, while horses nuzzle each other at hitching posts. They imagine kids playing chase over bricked streets and dirt alleys.

But in fact, Iowa's first main streets were the state's waterways, such as the Iowa and Mississippi Rivers. Waterways provided meeting places and also food – fish, clams, and turtles – to eat and trade. The fertile floodplains produced good soil for crops. When Native American tribes gathered and settled along waterways, there was much activity, socializing, and many events to celebrate.

Iowa's main streets – whether flowing rivers, dirt roads, or paved avenues – always have provided goods and services and a place to meet and mingle. When European-American townbuilders first came to Iowa in the 1830s, they planned and built Iowa's communities with these objectives in mind.

This issue of *The Goldfinch* takes you back to the main streets in Iowa's past. Learn how Iowans have made them places to live, work, and play. We'll show you how these business districts began, grew, and sometimes failed. You'll meet some Iowa kids who today are preserving a historic town square in their community. And you're invited to play our main street game to help you think about the changes on *your* town's main drag. It's all waiting to be discovered in this issue – and on the main street in your community. ■

– The Editor

THE Goldfinch

Volume 18, Number 3 ■ Spring 1997

EDPRESS

Winner of a 1995 Parents' Choice Honor Award

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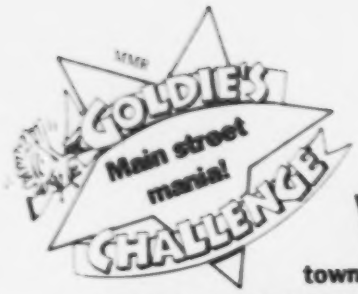
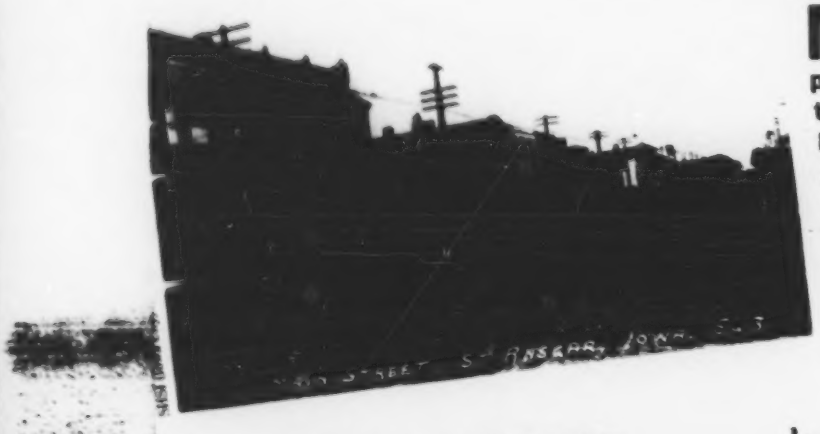


Visit your community's town hall, library, or historical society to find out when your town was laid out. Send the year, plus the name of your town, to *The Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, Iowa 52240, and we'll send you a free prize! Be sure to tell us your name, address, age, and grade in school.

P.S. What's the name of the primary business district in your town? It may be "Main Street," but it could be something else, too!

Postmark: main street

Main street once provided a town's identity. It was often photographed and made into postcards. Visitors and residents alike mailed these postcards to friends and family across Iowa and the country. In 1923, a resident of St. Ansgar, Iowa sent this postcard to her aunt in Iowa City. She wrote, "I thought you would be interested in seeing the main street in St. Ansgar." At the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City, we have about 12,000 postcards of hundreds of Iowa towns!



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Planning Iowa's towns

by Bridgett Williams-Searle & John Williams-Searle

Although Iowa towns come in different shapes and sizes, all serve common purposes. In towns, people live, work, exchange goods and ideas, and come together for day-to-day interaction and important events.

In the Iowa Territory, sometimes people planned towns, and sometimes towns just happened. When settlers moved from "back East," they tried to build towns like the ones they had left.

In other places, Iowans clustered together near water, timber, and transportation routes. Anywhere people gathered, general stores quickly sprung up and a community's business district began. Craftsmen built mills, blacksmith shops, and other businesses. Houses doubled as churches, taverns, and post offices.

Later, Iowans planned their towns more carefully. Representatives from Eastern land companies, entrepreneurs, and others **platted** towns, laying out streets to look like a grid of 90-degree angles. They built general stores, hotels, drugstores, and other businesses around a central square. The grid system of towns was similar to how the government organized townships and counties.

Town builders often made the town's main street wider than others because a community's main thoroughfare had to accommodate traffic, the heavy flow of shoppers, parades, social events, and political rallies. Main street property was often the most expensive in town and people built fancy, expensive buildings here.

Main streets in county seat towns were usually laid out around a square that held the courthouse. The county seat was located in the middle of the county so farm families could travel back and forth from the courthouse in one day. Iowa towns competed for the county seat because of the prosperity it would bring.

After the Civil War (1861-1865), railroad companies developed towns along their lines to attract more customers to the rails. They usually laid out towns along a main street lined with stores and businesses. The depot, lumberyard, grain elevator, and hotel were at one end of the street, across the tracks. Houses and schools were at the other end.

HOMES AND A WELCOME TO ALL!

GOOD FARMS FOR LITTLE MONEY!

Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company

LAND DEPARTMENT!

CHOICE PRAIRIE LANDS

IN EXCELLENT LOCATIONS, IN

IOWA AND NEBRASKA!

—AT—

LOW PRICES

ON 10 YEARS' CREDIT,

AT 6 PER CENT. INTEREST.

GEO. S. HARRIS,

Land Commissioner.

At BURLINGTON, IOWA, for Iowa Lands.

At LINCOLN, NEBRASKA, for Nebraska Lands.

This 1870s booklet recruited residents for new communities.

At the turn of the century, small town Iowa began to grow less isolated. Advances in communication and transportation took Iowans further away from the main street of their communities to larger towns. Many country schools closed and kids rode buses to schools miles from home.

Today, thousands of Iowans live in the state's small towns. This loyalty ensures the continued growth of these communities and their vital main street business districts that were planned so many years ago. ■

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Wild Rosie's map

Town planners envisioned communities in places that were little more than vast, empty spaces. They laid out towns on plats – maps that showed streets, parks, and public buildings. The map below is based on the plat of Keokuk. Study it closely, then fill it in by following the directions below. ***(Read more about Keokuk on page 7.)***

● In 1846, Lyman Johnson built a small brick house on the east side of Second Street, between Main and Johnson Streets. Draw Johnson's house in the right location.

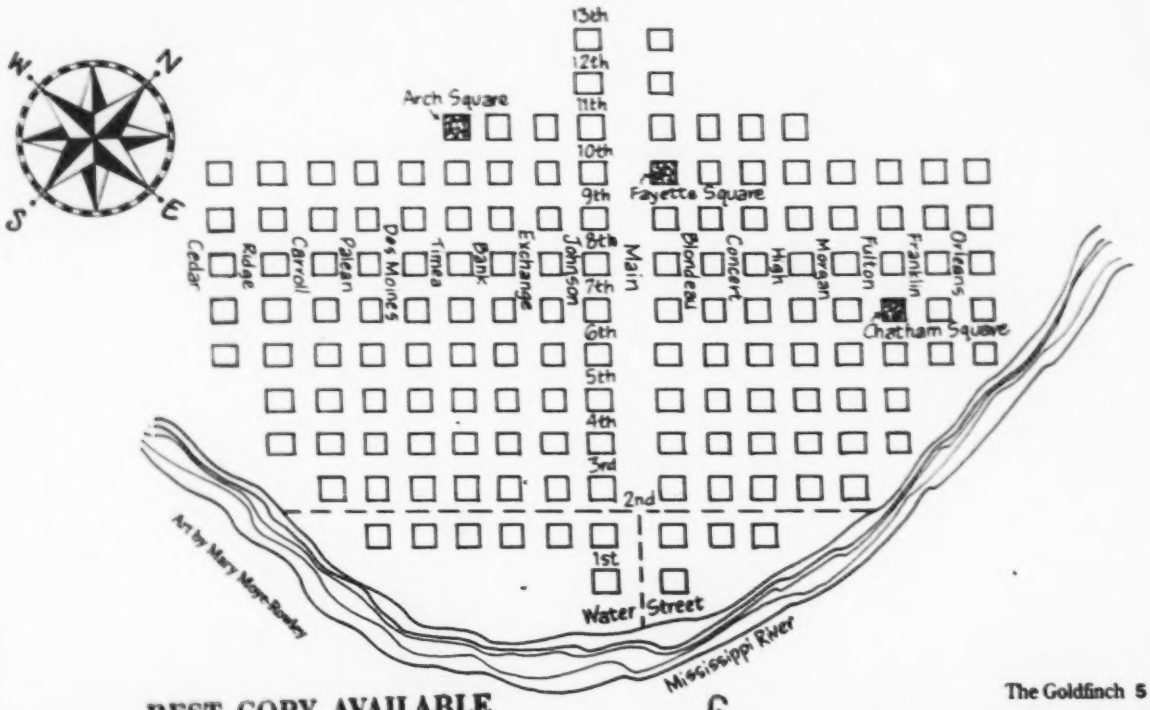
● In Keokuk's early days, Main Street was not accessible from the western part of town because of a big ravine around Sixth and Main Streets. Draw a stop sign there.

● Before Main Street became Keokuk's business center, the road closest to the river was the main street. Mark an "X" here.

● A pork-packing plant opened on the corner of Main and Third Streets in 1849. Draw a pig there.

● In 1851, Keokuk's main business district was located on Main Street between Second and Third Streets. Shade in this area.

● Draw a star on the city's widest street.



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Main street beginnings

A tale of three towns

by Amy Ruth

Iowa's European-American towns were planned as economic centers for business and trade and as social gathering spots. In order to survive, towns had to be built along transportation routes and near natural resources.

Early towns were located around rivers – the main transportation systems before roads and railroads.

Other towns sprung up simply because people in the area needed a place to process and trade their grain and livestock, buy goods, and socialize. The economic success of these farming communities depended on the condition and prices of crops.

When railroads crossed Iowa, town builders platted towns along railroad lines. A community with a railroad was more likely to prosper than one without.

As towns flourished or declined, many changes came to main street.

The Goldfinch **explored three Iowa towns to learn how their main streets developed.**

Main Street, Keokuk, c. 1915

Barnes Street, What Cheer, c. 1915

Main Street, Denison, c. 1910

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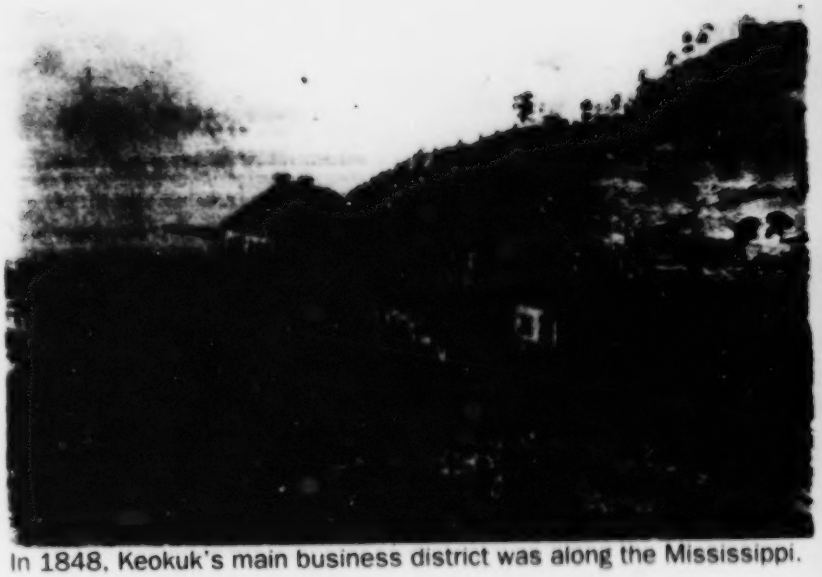
Keokuk



In 1848, Keokuk's main business district was along the Mississippi.

Like many towns in the United States, Keokuk started as a fur trading post. In 1820, the American Fur Company sent traders to southeastern Iowa to trade for animal pelts. When the Black Hawk War began in 1832, the company abandoned the post.

Five years later, Dr. Isaac Galland chose Keokuk as an ideal spot for a town. The land lay on the west bank of the mighty Mississippi River and at the mouth of the Des Moines River where there were rapids. It was here that boats had to dock and lighten their cargo before proceeding across the rapids. Galland knew that Keokuk would become an important stop for companies shipping supplies and merchandise from the east. The town became the gateway for markets along the northern Mississippi River valley, and points inland via the Des Moines River.

Dr. Galland planned the town, modeling it after the eastern city of Philadelphia. A newspaper later reported that "Where Main Street now is, so thick was the timber and underbrush that it was difficult to make the survey."

As Galland prepared maps of the town, his niece, Virginia Wilcox, helped color them.

Although Galland made one street wider than the others and called it Main Street, it would be some time before it became the primary business district. Town officials and citizens didn't even bother to clear all of Main Street of the trees and brush, and it remained inaccessible from the western side of town until 1843.

The first businesses in Keokuk clustered around the riverfront – the area's main trade and transportation route.

By 1851, as the town's population soared to almost 7,000, the commercial area expanded and businesses moved to Main Street.

Twenty years later in 1871, with Keokuk's population at more than 20,000, Main Street boasted hundreds of stores, including such specialty shops as a luggage store, a wallpaper shop, perfumeries, and a store that sold nothing but window shades.

Rail, and later highway, travel took business away from the once dominant river town. Today, these modes of transportation move goods in and out of the community that once relied almost solely on the Mississippi River for trade and transportation. ■

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What Cheer

The city of What Cheer grew up around the area's extensive coal deposits. People came from as far away as Europe to work in the mines.

What Cheer, like other mining communities, had an important link to the railroads. Without transportation, the mined coal could not reach its markets.

The community was originally called Petersburgh after Peter Britton who platted the town in 1855. The name was later changed to What Cheer when the town petitioned for a post office in the 1870s.

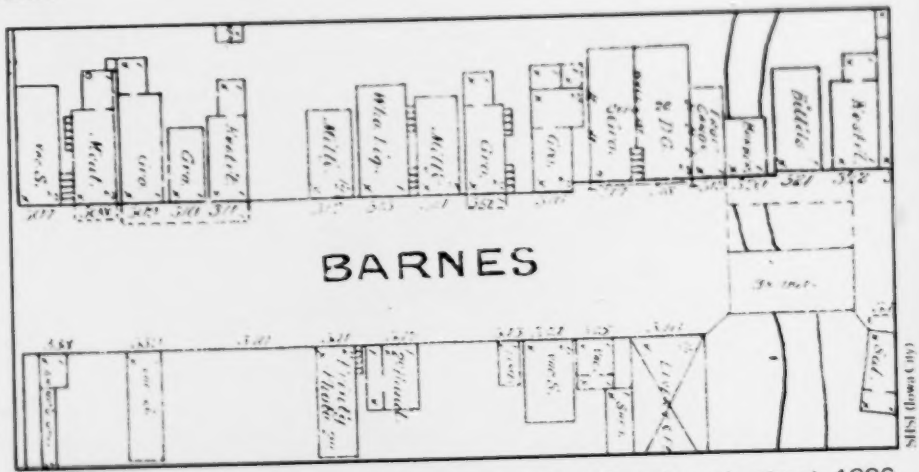
By 1883, two railroad lines ran tracks in four directions out of What Cheer. The community's population soared to 3,000 – ten times what it had been in 1880. People came to What Cheer to profit from the mining industry. By 1888, there were more than 100 mines. Daily, more than 20 trains loaded with coal left the city. One historian wrote that the town's children "studied to the vibration of passing coal trains."

What Cheer's main street was called Barnes. For much of the mid and late 1800s, Barnes Street catered mostly to the miners and their families. One historian wrote that "miners wore hobnailed shoes and could easily be heard walking on the board sidewalks."

The south side of Barnes Street was the busiest in the late 1800s. Two general stores, a drugstore, wagon shop, hotel, and post office were among the first businesses on Barnes.

As the town grew, more business sprung up on Barnes Street – a butcher, a jewelry store, a grocery, and a hat shop. Additional businesses – including a shoe shop, restaurant, implement store, and many saloons – spread to the north side of this busy street.

When the coal mines closed around the turn of the century, residents went to work digging out natural clay deposits. The residents and merchants of What Cheer continued to rely on the area's natural resources to keep the town – and its main street – thriving. ■



This fire insurance map shows businesses on What Cheer's main street, 1886. Shade in five grocery stores, a meat market, and the livery and feed store.

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Denison

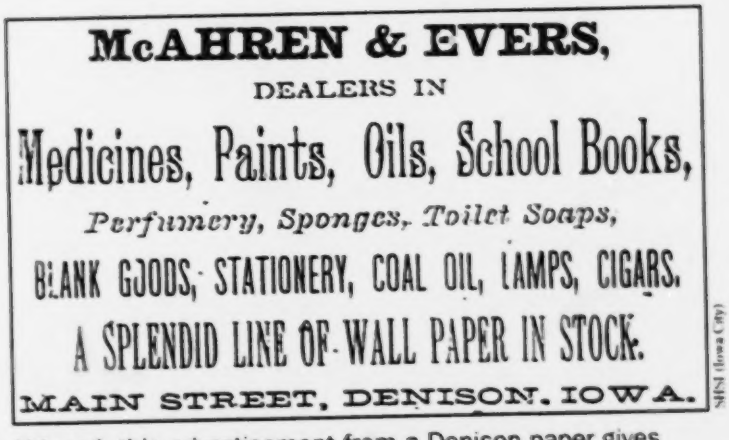
Long before European-American townbuilders came to Iowa, Native Americans used the area around Denison as a gathering place. They hunted and processed buffalo and other animals. Their main streets were woodlands, prairies, and flood plains, and here they manufactured, traded, and socialized.

Centuries later, Jesse W. Denison came to western Iowa in 1856 to plat a town for an eastern land company.

Denison knew that in a few years the railroad would stretch across Iowa, and he placed the town to take advantage of the new markets the rail lines would create. The railroad would bring goods into the new town, attracting businesses, residents, and visitors who would help the town prosper.

Denison set aside blocks of land for public parks and buildings, quickly selling the remaining plots of land to private citizens.

He planned the commercial district to be located on Main and Broadway Streets, and he made these streets wider than others.


McAHREN & EVERS,
DEALERS IN
Medicines, Paints, Oils, School Books,
Perfumery, Sponges, Toilet Soaps,
BLANK GOODS, STATIONERY, COAL OIL, LAMPS, CIGARS,
A SPLENDID LINE OF WALL PAPER IN STOCK.
MAIN STREET, DENISON, IOWA.

SHS (Iowa City)

Although this advertisement from a Denison paper gives the address of the business as "Main Street," most advertisers did not include this information. People knew that most shops were on or nearby Main Street.

Businesses began to open and soon merchants sold many goods, from harnesses and hardware to watches and washboards.

In addition to goods, railroads brought immigrants. After the 1860s, German immigrants settled in Denison and opened businesses. Main Street stores boasted signs in both English and German.

As more and more people moved to Denison and surrounding areas, main street developed problems. In the 1870s, the street had to be repaired. Also around the same time, it was said that to walk on Main Street at night was dangerous because the sidewalks were in such poor condition.

To raise money for new board sidewalks, the Young People's Society sold tickets to a dinner festival. The proceeds supplied the lumber, but residents and merchants were responsible for building the walks in front of their lots.

By the 1890s, with almost 100 businesses in Denison, stores on Main Street competed with one another. One jeweler treated townspeople to a free concert. Another merchant put three monkeys in his shop window to attract customers. ■

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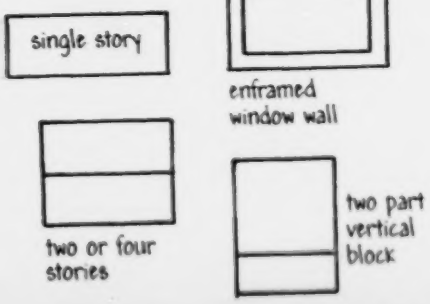
Take a walking tour

Put on your walking shoes and hit the streets in your community's business district. (Remember that a town's main street isn't always called "Main Street.") Use this guide to help you study the buildings you see. Which styles and building materials are most common? Circle the styles you see.

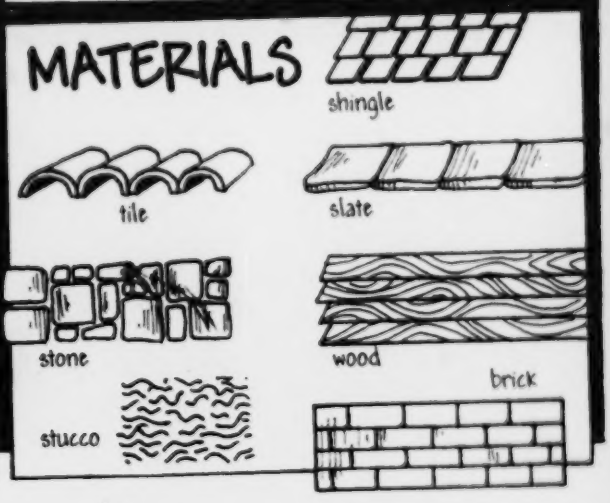
SHAPE



ROOFS

WINDOWS

MATERIALS



Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

Main street was a place to shop, trade, catch up on local news and politics, have farm equipment repaired, and listen to a local band concert. These shoppers pose in front of a Sabula, Iowa restaurant in 1901.

Old photographs tell us how main street has looked throughout Iowa history, but photos can't reveal how main street felt, smelled, and sounded. We must look to other historical documents – written by those who lived at the time – for these details.

In a 1976 writing contest, senior citizens across Iowa wrote about the main streets in their childhood towns. These essays take us back to Iowa in the early 1900s when main street was a vital economic and social center.

Horses added to the sounds of main street. Hooves made clopping noises as horses walked on dirt, brick, or cobblestone roads. As they waited at hitching posts, horses whinnied and neighed. After taking a refreshing drink from the water trough, they snorted, shaking their bridles while their reins made heavy, rustling sounds.

Wooden wagon wheels "thunk thunked" through town, sending up little clouds of dust and making far different sounds than today's rubber wheels on

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concrete. When it rained, wagon wheels cut huge ruts in dirt roads that filled with water, making main street a muddy mess.

Mary Bentley fondly remembered riding down Sioux City's main street in 1913. "The thrill of my life was to sit on the lofty seat beside the driver and help drive the team down Main Street." These open wagons were comfortable in spring, summer, and fall, but Mary and others bundled up for winter trips.

Elevated wooden sidewalks, like the one pictured on the cover, helped keep people out of the sloshy mud and dirt. But townspeople wore heavy boots and shoes, just in case. As women went about their shopping, you would have heard the faint brushing sound of their skirts trailing on the sidewalks.

Sounds from the blacksmith shop rang down main street as the smithy made horseshoes and other metal items. The bellows whipped up a hot fire with a gusty "whoosh." The "clank clank" of the hammer hitting the anvil could be heard across town. Arlene Dutton wrote that in her hometown, "the sound made you put your fingers in your ears!"

Before the car replaced the horse as the primary mode of transportation, the blacksmith's shop was a vital main street business.

Just like the ring of the blacksmith's hammer, the smells of main street drifted through the community. The piles of horse droppings, mixed with mud, gave off a distinct, unpleasant odor. Most Iowans in the early 1900s were accustomed to this smell, but they still watched for horse droppings when they crossed the street.

Main street had pleasant smells, too. When the bakery door opened, people on the sidewalk smelled fresh bread, cakes, pies, and candies.

Ruth Barkley, whose father owned a general store in 1910, remembered that in the family store "the first smell to meet the nostrils was the sauerkraut [sower-KROWT]. It was kept in a large wooden barrel with a loose lid." Tubs of fish, barrels of pickles, sacks of coffee, and a large wheel of cheese all added to odors that greeted customers when they entered the general store.

Barkley also remembered

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the smell of fresh sawdust from the lumber mill just down the street. "I used to love that smell," she wrote. "Occasionally in the meat market I would get a faint whiff of wood when the meat man had covered the floor around the meat blocks with fresh sawdust."

In many Iowa towns, the railroad tracks ran parallel to the nearby main street. Evelyn Williams remembered that the railroad depot in her hometown of Leeds was across from the movie theater. "We loved to watch the trains come in and if we were daring enough we stood on the platform when the 5:00 Flyer came in," she wrote. "How it shook the whole place and almost took our breath away."

Most movies in the early 1900s were silent flicks accompanied by a piano player. Some were shown outside on main street. Ellen Graham Lemke remembered that in her hometown "the piano player made the most wonderful sound effects. She knew just exactly the right mood music to play. How she would thump that old piano when the rustlers were running from the sheriff, or play that sneaky music when the bad guy was sneaking up on our hero. That music would make our hair stand on end."

Rolling wagon wheels on muddy streets, the thundering railroad through town, and board sidewalks all added to the sounds of main street life.

Photos: SHSI (Iowa City)

As main street changed, so too have its sights, sounds, and smells. Now we see electric signs overhead and yellow stripes on the pavement below. We smell gasoline and diesel fumes and listen to the sounds of car horns and radios, motorcycles, and in-line skates zipping over concrete sidewalks. In many Iowa towns, much of the hustle and bustle has moved to the mall, but main street in some places is still where folks come to buy, sell, and socialize. ■

14

Changes on main street

by Lin Ly

From the one-horse town of the 1840s to the lively market center of the turn of the century, Iowans have witnessed many transformations on main street, including changes in transportation, street equipment, and consumer needs.

Into the 1860s, kerosene and gas lamps still lit Iowa's main streets and did not offer the convenience of electricity. Someone had to light the street lamps at dusk and snuff them out at night.

Albert Austad remembered when electricity came to Decorah's main street when he was a boy. "The first electric lights were on brackets on telephone poles," Austad wrote. "They didn't have bulbs, but carbon sticks, and when they burned out the lamps were lowered within reach and the carbon sticks replaced."

About the turn of the century, brand name products became popular. Shoppers no longer wanted soda crackers or rice out of barrels. Instead, they paid more for individually packaged goods. Stores that did not stock popular national brands lost customers. Mail-order catalogs and rural free delivery opened additional markets. Iowans ordered goods from Chicago, St. Louis, and other cities, bypassing main street stores.

The telephone also changed main street. Poles and wires added another layer to the main street scene, but more significantly, telephones permitted people to keep in touch from home. Iowans had already found other places to shop, now they no longer had to go to town to socialize. They could flip through a mail-order catalog at home, while chatting with friends on the phone.

Advances in transportation also changed the appearance of main street. Before the automobile, horses took Iowans from one place to another.

In the early 1900s, Iowans struggled to transform roads made for horse-drawn vehicles into paved streets for vehicles with tires. Horses easily traveled the dirt streets that were rutted from wagon and buggy wheels, but it was hard for cars to drive on dirt surfaces.

Towns experimented with surfacing materials such as gravel, tar, brick, asphalt, and concrete to accommodate the automobile and the horse-drawn

Electric lights first lit up Iowa's streets in the 1880s. This photo was taken in Harlan, Iowa in 1911.

vehicle. Main street businesses applauded road improvements because better roads meant more customers.

As cars replaced horses, parking meters replaced hitching posts. Harness-makers, blacksmiths, and livery stables disappeared. Gas stations, garages, and motels succeeded them, extending the business district along the highway out of town.

Because of the faster speed of cars, main street travelers gained a horizontal **perspective**. They could no longer look up, down, and all around as they did when they rode in the slower-moving, open wagon. Accordingly, the shape of main street changed. The new architecture emphasized shorter buildings, wider windows, and lower signs that were more easily viewed from a moving car.

As more Iowa roads were paved in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, and as the state's highway system expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, more consumers drove further from home to shop for a larger selection and variety of goods available in other retail outlets. Main street businesses again lost customers.

Soon, Iowans could find everything they needed in supermarkets, discount stores, and malls. One-stop shopping discouraged shoppers from visiting main street where they had to visit several stores. Individual artisans and craftsmen couldn't compete with larger manufacturers. Some artisans stayed in business by adapting their talents.

Cars influenced main street in many ways. Garages replaced livery stables (left) and buildings became more horizontal (above) to accommodate window shoppers in cars.

Photos: SHSI (Iowa City)

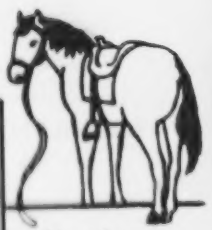
With advances in farm machinery and methods, less hands were required to do the work once done by large farm families. When rural residents relocated to urban areas, main street businesses suffered.

Hard times, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s, affected small towns that relied on the business of surrounding farm families. When people stopped spending money on main street, stores closed down and shop owners had to relocate.

New highways and freeways became express routes to malls – the modern business and social centers.

While the automobile has left some main streets in the dust, others survive by providing quality goods and services, encouraging Iowans to spend their money locally. ■

THE MAINSTREET GAME



Start

A general store is the first business on Main Street. Advance 1.

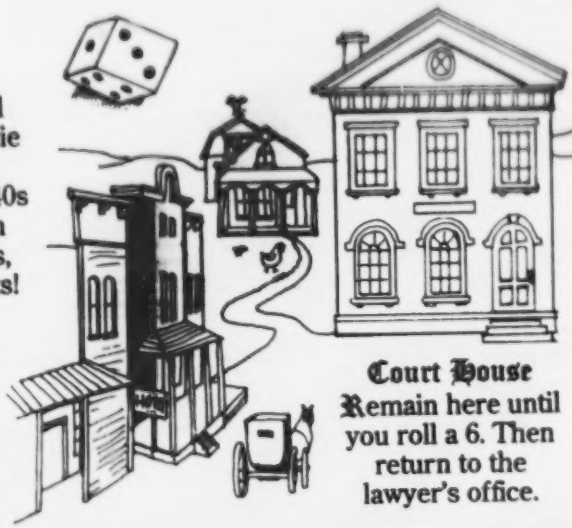
Roll again.

A rainstorm makes a muddy mess. You ruin your best shoes. Lose a turn.

Your horse breaks free from a hitching post and wanders away. Lose a turn.

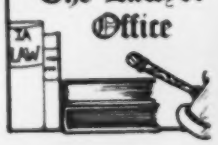
Instructions

Use coins, buttons, or other small tokens as playing pieces. Roll the die and advance around Main Street. The game will take you from an 1840s Main Street to a present day Main Street. Watch out for muddy roads, runaway horses and parking tickets!



The railroad is coming to town! Advance 2 .

The Lawyer Office



Court House
Remain here until you roll a 6. Then return to the lawyer's office.

Finish

You attend a *Project Main Street* meeting. Advance 1.

Stop and chat with the mayor about restoring historic Main Street.

A mall opens nearby and 3 shops on Main Street close. Return to start.

You take a walking tour of historic Main Street. Advance 2.

The historic opera house on Main Street is bulldozed. Go back 3.

An angry mob of farmers blocks traffic on Main Street. Go back 2.

The farm recession is in full swing and many stores are closing. Go back 1.

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Main Street finally has sidewalks! Roll again.

A fire breaks out in the general store and destroys an entire block. Return to start.

Your family's wagon gets stuck in the mud and you're late for the band concert. Lose a turn.

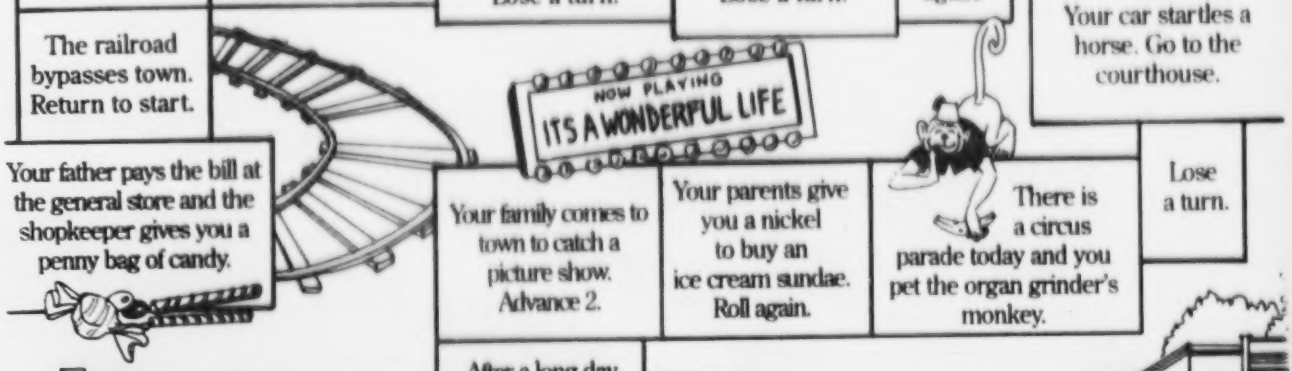
You try to sell your family's produce door to door. No one is buying. Lose a turn.

You see a car for the first time! Roll again.

Take a break and read this week's edition of the local paper.

The railroad bypasses town. Return to start.

Your car startles a horse. Go to the courthouse.



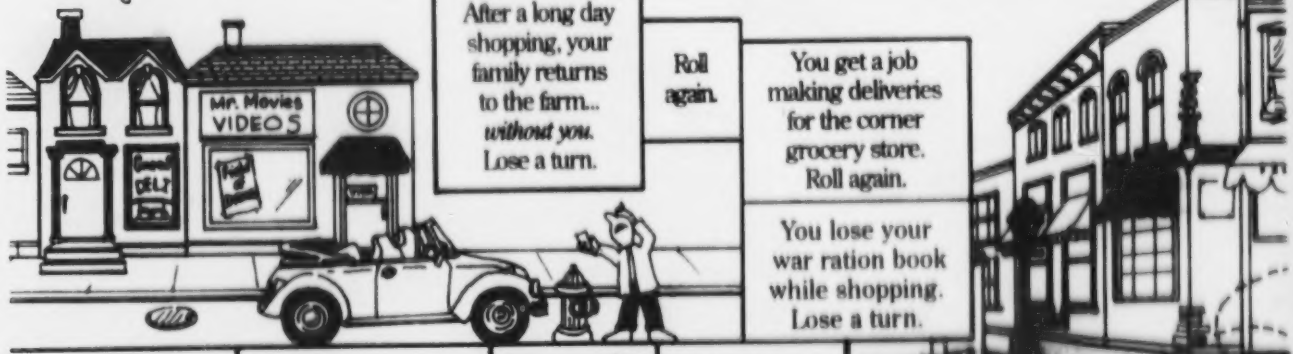
Your father pays the bill at the general store and the shopkeeper gives you a penny bag of candy.

Your family comes to town to catch a picture show. Advance 2.

Your parents give you a nickel to buy an ice cream sundae. Roll again.

There is a circus parade today and you pet the organ grinder's monkey.

Lose a turn.



After a long day shopping, your family returns to the farm... *without you.* Lose a turn.

Roll again.

You get a job making deliveries for the corner grocery store. Roll again.

You lose your war ration book while shopping. Lose a turn.

Spend the day window shopping.

You get a parking ticket while shopping. Go to the courthouse.

ONE WAY

Go back 2.

You find a silver dollar. Advance 3.

Main street festivals

by Millie K. Frese

Main street parades, like this one in Fort Madison in 1908, are still popular in Iowa.

Main streets ebb and flow through Iowa towns and through the daily lives of Iowans. Whether they're called Main Street, First Avenue, Central, or affectionately known as "the main drag," main streets have been the places within communities where individuals come together to be part of a bigger family and to experience the historic, the ordinary, and the festive moments of their lives.

In the 1800s, main street was a place to showcase a town. Memorials, fairs, and art displays showed off citizens' talents.

Ordinary life stood still when major shows came to town. By the 1850s, circus parades drew crowds on main streets throughout the Midwest. Iowans of all ages were eager to see elephants, tigers, acrobats, and clowns. For a time, main street became a jungle from an exotic land. When it was over, everyone had something to talk about.

Memorial Day, first observed in 1868, also was celebrated on main street as bands, military companies, veterans, and citizens paraded to local cemeteries to decorate graves.

Patriotic holidays brought communities together on main street. On July 4, 1876, people in Algona celebrated the 100th anniversary of the nation's independence from Britain. They jammed sidewalks along main street for a mile-long parade.

Ruth Barkley of Odebolt remembered the day an organ grinder with a monkey in a red suit entertained on main street in the early 1900s.

"In my eagerness to see, I crowded too close and that monkey grabbed one of my long braids and held on," she recalled years later. "The people who saw it happen laughed, but I didn't think it was funny."

Main street merchants soon realized the attraction of store bargains. Seasonal festivals, holiday promotions, and contests drew crowds while boosting sales. The April 18, 1912 Fort Dodge *Messenger* reported

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that railroad passenger cars were "filled to capacity" transporting shoppers to a city-wide sale called "Bargain Day." Prices were so astoundingly low, according to one shopper, that it was worth traveling many miles. "I shall never miss Bargain Day as long as I live," she said.

Lillian Gassman grew up in Dubuque in the early 1900s and marched in the annual Sunday School picnic parade. A church leader played *Onward Christian Soldiers* on the bells. "It made us feel like little angels," she remembered.

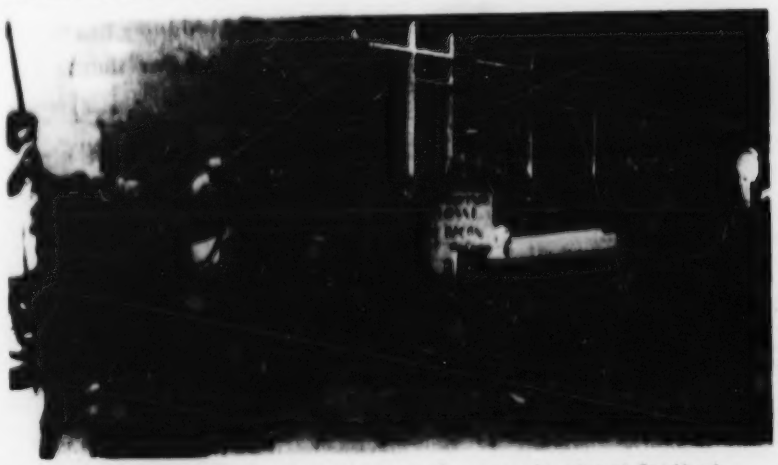
In Lakota, Iowa, the town's two-block-long main street was roped off in preparation for Sauerkraut Day in August 1935, the same afternoon the Gerzema family moved to town. Concession stands, a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, and dunk tank captured the three Gerzema children's attention, recalled their mother, Polly. Former residents regularly returned for Sauerkraut Day, reunions with old friends, and a free meal of wieners and kraut.

Key moments in national history were marked on main streets. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, people mourned together on main street. On April 14, 1945, church bells tolled, flags flew at half staff, and businesses closed on the day of his funeral.

Four months later, main streets throughout Iowa celebrated peace when Japan's surrender ended World War II. "Wild Celebration Welcomes Victory Announcement Here," read one of many bold headlines in the August 15, 1945 Fort Dodge *Messenger*. "Joyful crowds turn Central Avenue into Bedlam for many hours," the newspaper reported.

Communities also faced hard times together on main streets. When fires or tornadoes destroyed homes and businesses, people came together to rally support. When a coal strike in 1946 threatened the nation's power supply, people in Iowa towns turned out the lights to conserve energy – even when it meant holiday lights along main street would remain unlit.

Main streets fostered community spirit and pride by bringing Iowans together to celebrate the good times and survive the bad ones. ■



SHSI (Iowa City)

No subject was too small or obscure for a main street festival. These youngsters are preparing for a pet parade in Lovilia, Iowa in the 1940s.

To town!

SHSI (Iowa City)

The weekly visit to main street was an opportunity to see friends.

For Iowa's town dweller, a stroll down main street was nothing special. Townspeople made up the routine of daily town life. They lived, worked, and played in a close-knit community of friends, neighbors, and family. On a daily basis, folks in town enjoyed concerts, social and academic clubs, speeches, parties, and other community events. All these happenings contributed to the character of a town.

But when farm families paused from their work to walk, ride, and later drive into town, usually on Saturdays, main street exploded with people and energy. Farm families came to town to do what town folks could do every day – stock up on supplies, meet with friends, and exchange news and gossip.

Men and women met at different places. Men hung out at the barbershop, the blacksmith's shop, and the saloon. Women congregated at the milliner's, where they had dresses and hats made, and at the general store. Children tagged along with parents, hoping a kindly merchant would give them a free bag of candy.

On the main street of Adelaide [ADD-ah-layed] Lloyd's childhood, summer Saturday visits to town meant a concert on the city square.

"Farm families anxious to get the week's groceries before the music began, came to town first," Lloyd recalled. "Everyone gathered on the sidewalks surrounding the bandstand. At eight o'clock, the director gave the signal to begin.

"While the band played stirring marches or dreamy waltzes, farm wives sold their eggs or bought groceries or dress material in the general store," Lloyd remembered. "Farmers discussed crops and prices. Older children sat on the curb and talked; younger children played tag around their mothers. The soda fountain in the drugstore grew crowded. Children whose pennies would not cover the cost of a fifteen cent soda were usually able to produce a nickel for an ice cream cone."

Going to town on Saturday night also was a family ritual for Ellen Graham Lemke. "Daddy gave sister and me a dime a piece for the movies," Lemke recalled. After the show, they wasted no time getting to the ice cream parlor.

Later, walking arm-in-arm, Lemke and her friends wandered the streets, window shopping. "The jewelry shop window held our interest the longest," she wrote years later.

As the hour grew late, Saturday nights on main street wound down. People wandered home, already looking forward to the next week's trip to town. ■

21

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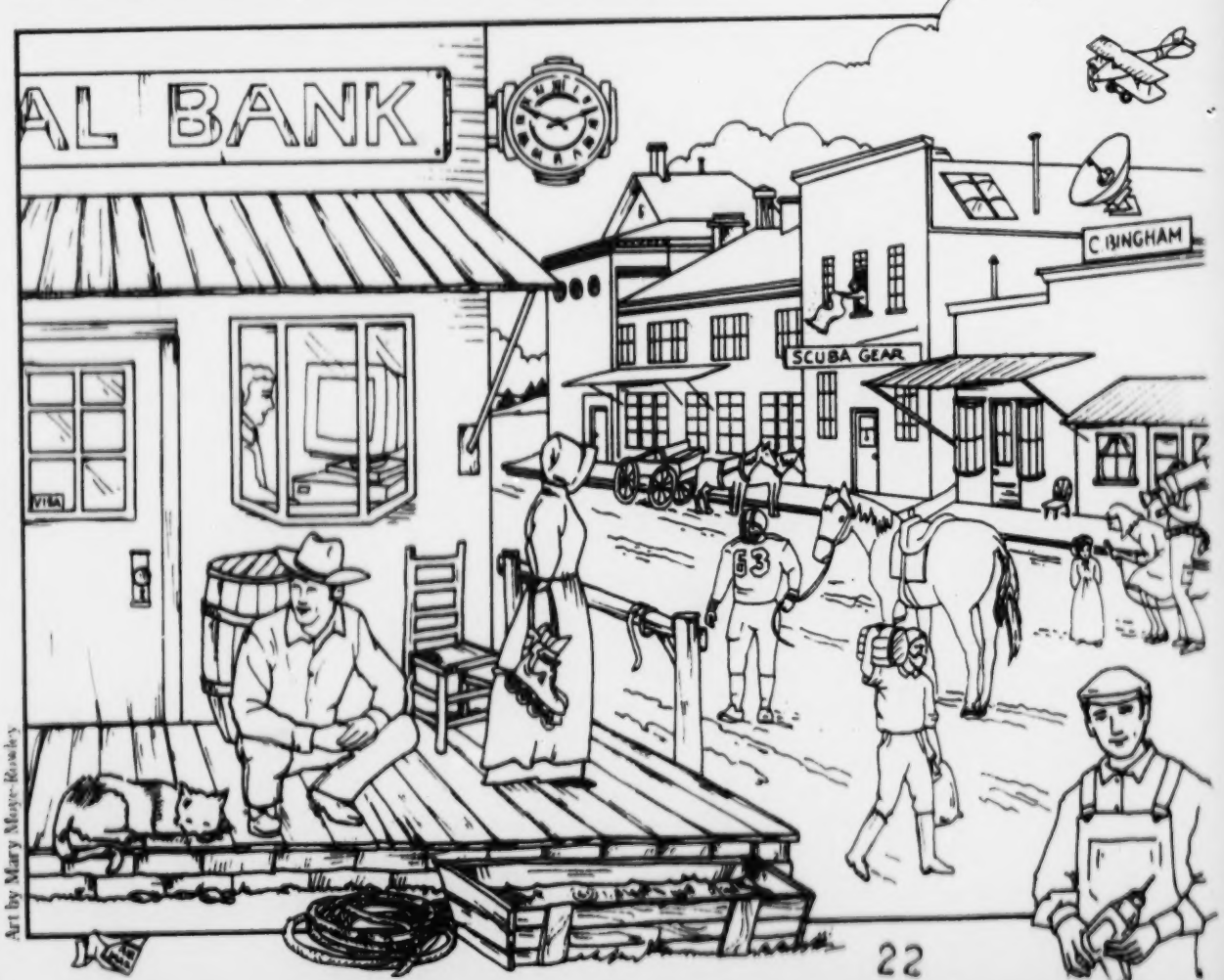
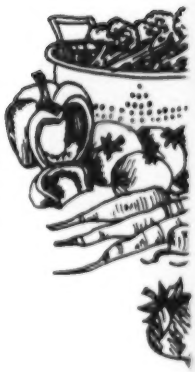
What's on main street?

It's the year 1870. You and your family have just moved to main street from a farm in the country. What things can you expect to find in town during this time period? Circle the things that do NOT belong on an 1870s main street. Answers on page 30.



Art by Mary Maye-Rowley

Working on main street



Main street has always extended job opportunities to young people. From apprenticeships in general stores and photographers' studios to jobs sweeping up in a parent's shop or delivering groceries, kids have contributed to Iowa's small-town economy. *The Goldfinch* peeked into the past for examples of jobs that kept kids busy throughout the state. Here's what we found.

Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

Grand Mound, Iowa, c. 1910

"What I remember most about main street in our little town is the general store that my father operated. This little store was on the northwest corner of the square.

It was during my teen years that I was called upon to help out at the store, and my job for the most part was to candle eggs in the back room [to see if embryos were present] – a job I wasn't too fond of."

– Clara Bartling

Dubuque, Iowa, c. 1910

"One summer a Professor Horchum got a dozen or more boys together and formed a group called Park Life. There were older boys as leaders. They found a piece of land out near Point Park and made a big garden. They bought a wagon and a pair of mules. The produce from the garden was taken to the city market every Saturday and sold. This was a very fine thing for the boys."

– Mary Goodman

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Denison, Iowa, 1911

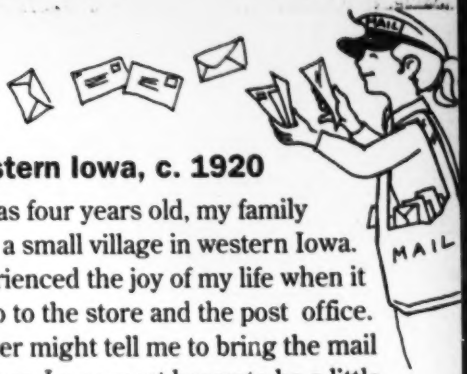
"I am privileged to write about the main street I lived on as a child. All families on our street had big gardens. I had to help pull radishes and onions from ours and bunch them. My mother would then put them in small grape baskets. I had to sell them from house to house for 3 cents a bunch." – *Caroline Logan*

Clear Lake, Iowa, 1918

"I was eight years old when we moved to Iowa from Kansas. My father went to work for Mr. Williams who ran a furniture store and funeral store. My mother found a job at a cafe on main street and they needed someone to pick up milk, cream, butter and buttermilk three times a week.

I had a little red coaster wagon and walked from my home to the cafe. As soon as I picked up the order, I would go to the creamery. The man at the creamery would load the wagon with the order and I would take it back to the cafe, where the cook or his helper would unload the wagon for me. When they needed a variety of dairy products I received $1.00 for the trip. When it was only milk and buttermilk, I received 50 cents for a trip.

My mother was part time help and on her days off, we picked strawberries for a nice lady who lived about three blocks from us. I think we received 5 cents a quart for picking the berries." – *Nina Albertus*



Western Iowa, c. 1920

"When I was four years old, my family lived in a small village in western Iowa. I always experienced the joy of my life when it was time to go to the store and the post office. The Postmaster might tell me to bring the mail to the neighbors. I was most happy to be a little mailcarrier and to receive a little reward for my money cup." – *Mary Dorothea*

Clinton, Iowa, c. 1930

"After school I worked at the grocery store as a bag boy. I would earn a dollar a week and out of that dollar I was expected to buy a pair of pants and a shirt." – *Ken Farwell*

Ask Yourself

- **How did Nina Albertus get her job as a delivery girl?**
- **Why was it sometimes Mary Dorothea's job to deliver the mail?**
- **Why did Ken Farwell work at the grocery store?**

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by Lin Ly

Be a photo historian

SHSI (Iowa City)

Iowans in the early 1900s experienced an important transition when the automobile was introduced. It wasn't an easy adjustment. Iowa's roads – especially the bustling main streets – presented many obstacles for the novice automobile driver. Horses, **pedestrians**, bad road conditions, and street equipment – like lamp posts and fire hydrants – all helped create hazards.

To learn more about the beginnings of automobile transportation, study the photograph above, taken around 1915 near Clinton, and think about the following questions.

1. What do you think caused this accident? Why?
2. How did the condition of the road make driving difficult?
3. Do you think the car was driving too fast? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think a crowd gathered?
5. What three clues in the picture tell you the season is fall?
6. Why do you think this photograph was taken?
7. How is this photograph important to history?

pedestrians – people on foot

Answers on page 30

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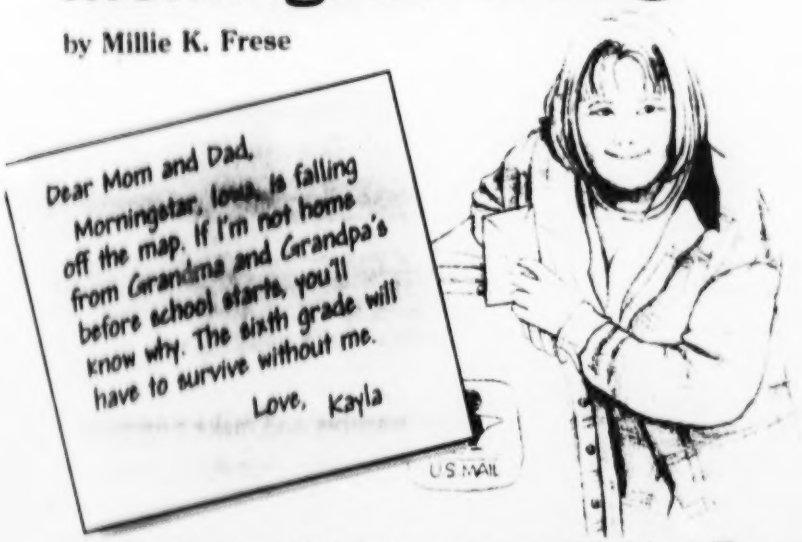
Morningstar Rising

by Millie K. Frese


Dear Mom and Dad,
Morningstar, Iowa, is falling off the map. If I'm not home from Grandma and Grandpa's before school starts, you'll know why. The sixth grade will have to survive without me.
Love, Kayla
U.S. MAIL

Kayla Murphy folded the letter and slipped it into an envelope addressed to her parents in Chicago. It was their idea for her to spend the summer in Morningstar with her grandparents. They thought it was important for her to get in touch with her Iowa roots. *Their roots*, she thought, giggling at the image of a small town sliding off a map.

Thoughts of a town living or dying had never troubled Kayla. She lived in the city, and the city was always there, noisy and alive. But that's all her grandparents talked about. They were afraid Morningstar was dying.

"Is Main Street always this empty?" Kayla asked Grandma as they walked past deserted store fronts on their way to the post office to mail her letter. There was no one else on the sidewalk.

"These days I'm afraid so," Grandma answered. "But it wasn't always this way." Grandma paused in front of a vacant display window. "This was a hardware store. You should have seen these windows bursting with toys at Christmas time! When we came to town for our weekly shopping, I could hardly pull your father away. I wouldn't be surprised if his nose print is still here on the glass..." Grandma's voice trailed off with the memory.

"You only shopped once a week?" Kayla asked in disbelief.

"Oh, yes. We lived out on the farm then. There was so much work to do with the crops, cows, chickens and housework – we didn't have time to come to town more than once a week. When we did, I sold eggs – 25 dozen or more in a good week– butter, vegetables from the garden in the summertime – anything we couldn't use ourselves. Then I'd buy fabric and groceries. You know, I made all of your father's clothes back then."

That made Kayla giggle.

"Over there on the corner – that brick building. That was the bank," Grandma said, pointing. "It closed fifteen years ago. That's when the town started falling apart."

Kayla pulled open the heavy post office door. She dropped her letter in the slot while

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Grandma collected their mail. Mr. Whitaker, the postmaster, who doubled as Morningstar's mayor, was talking on the phone – or rather, listening, with an occasional "hmm, I see." He motioned for Grandma to wait.

"That beats everything," he said, hanging up the phone. "Afternoon, Mrs. Murphy. You'll never guess what's happened..."

Dear Mom and Dad,

Morningstar's back on the map. Someone who grew up here died and left all his money to the town for improvements. The catch is the residents have to do all the work themselves – the money can only be used for supplies. That made a lot of people angry, but Grandpa says it's a good thing because then people will have to work together.

Guess I'll be home before school starts after all.

Love ya,
Kayla

P.S. Dad, I saw your nose prints on the old hardware store window!

Almost everyone in town was at the special council meeting to discuss the inheritance. Some people wanted to use the money to improve the city water system. "But we can't build a water tower like we need ourselves, and the will says we have to do the work and buy the supplies," someone countered.

People started arguing about what they couldn't do with the money and complaining about the town's decline. That's when Grandpa stood up. He'd never looked quite so tall to Kayla before.

"Folks, the way I see it," he began, "we can lament the fact that times have changed and roll over and die with the good old days. Or, we can work together and make a future for our town. We'll never get another chance like this."

The audience sat in hushed silence. Then the ideas began to flow.

"Let's paint the old creamery, build shelves inside, and buy books," someone suggested. "Think of what a library would mean to the young people..."

"The square looks pretty run-down. We could do some landscaping..."

"We could build a community center on the vacant lot on Main Street..."

"Yes," many voices chimed in. "Let's bring Main Street back to life!"

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Dear Mom and Dad,

Grandpa's in charge of organizing workers for Morningstar's new Main Street. The garden club has taken over the square. Mrs. Whitaker let me help her paint a mural on a wall inside the old creamery – or should I say the new library. No one knew she was an artist. The painting is of the town square in the summertime with people in the garden. Some are dressed in old-fashioned clothes (like the ones Grandma used to make you, Dad! Ha! Ha!!) and some are dressed in modern clothes. It's like Morningstar – a mixture of old and new.

Farmers drove their tractors into town this morning to haul away junk. By supper time the new Community Center's "skeleton" was built – at least that's what it looks like to me. There are people working all the time – sometimes all night long. What a racket! Grandpa bought me a hammer of my own! Tomorrow, I'm assigned to carpentry duty. Can you believe it? Grandpa says when we pour the new sidewalk, I can put my hand prints in the cement. We're already planning a parade and town picnic to celebrate at the end of the summer. The problem is that if everyone who's worked on Main Street is in the parade, who will stand on the new sidewalks to watch? Maybe I won't be home before school starts after all.

Love,
Kayla

Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

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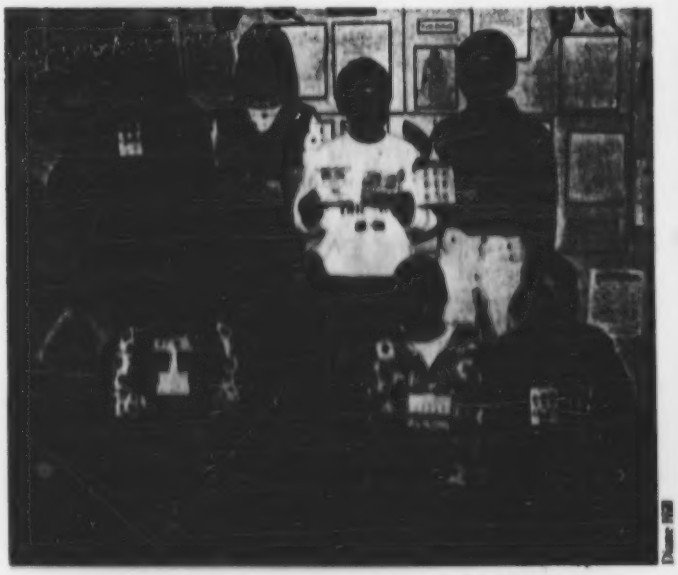
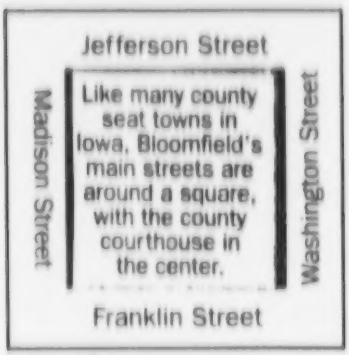
History makers

A gift for main street

by Amy Ruth



Above top: Bloomfield's town square in the 1950s. *Above bottom:* Kassidy Greenfield demonstrates how she made her building. *Right:* Bloomfield sixth graders and their buildings. Back row, L-R: Kassidy Greenfield, Kyla Dykes, Kelly Birchmier, Dustin Rook. Front row, L-R: Amanda Totten, Whitney Howk, Brittany Fowler, Clint Lister.


Jefferson Street
Like many county seat towns in Iowa, Bloomfield's main streets are around a square, with the county courthouse in the center.
Madison Street
Washington Street
Franklin Street

Students in Bloomfield, Iowa have given their community a unique gift.

In a project designed by teacher Judy Combs, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in Bloomfield's Extended Learning Program built miniature models of the buildings that line their community's historic town square district.

The town square, which was planned in 1844, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a national program that identifies historic places.

"We've had compliments that it's the most unique courthouse and square in the state," said Kelly Birchmier, 12.

Student architects

The students spent hours on their models. First, they walked

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Clint, Kelly, and Dustin discuss the model county courthouse they built.

Sixth graders and teacher Judy Combs decorate a holiday tree with their miniature buildings.

around the town square to get the feel for the area and choose one of 47 buildings to replicate. Next, they studied historical and contemporary photographs, using a magnifying glass to detect the details.

Then the students were ready to begin construction. Using rulers, they drew the outline of the building, cut it out, and then colored in the details, including fancy cornices, window mouldings, and awnings. They used foam board to give their buildings a three-dimensional effect.

"You learned to erase a lot!" said Kassidy Greenfield, 11.

When they had completed the buildings, the students presented them to the town by making them into ornaments and hanging them on a holiday tree in an empty storefront window.

"It makes you feel good that other people get to see what you've done," said Amanda Totten, 11.

One business owner was so impressed that he sent the class a letter asking to buy the model of his building. The students were pleased to present him with the ornament.

Community crusaders

Throughout the project, the kids learned about architecture, how to study buildings, and how architecture can influence the business inside a structure.

"I used to think buildings were plain, but now I know they are very detailed," Amanda said.

"It's almost like you can't drive by a building anymore and not look at it," added Kyla Dykes, 12.

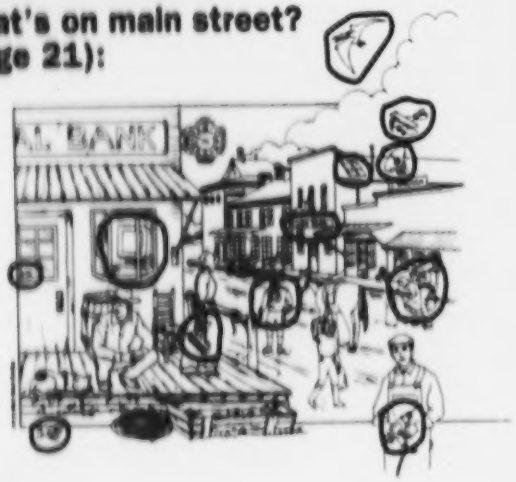
But these students also discovered something else – that their community means a lot to them, and they want to help preserve it.

"In a way we helped save the buildings," said Whitney Howk, 12. "In two years, they might be gone, but we'll always have them."

"What we've done, it's giving part of our heritage," added Kassidy. "It gives you a feeling of accomplishment." ■

Answers

What's on main street? (page 21):



Attention teachers!

We know you are looking for new and interesting ways to use *The Goldfinch* with your students. We listened to your suggestions and put together a teachers' guide for this issue. It's filled with activity suggestions, a bibliography, a timeline, discussion questions, and more. To get your FREE copy, send a written request along with a self-addressed, stamped, unsealed envelope to:

***The Goldfinch* Teachers' Guide**
State Historical Society of Iowa
402 Iowa Ave.
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Be a photo historian (page 24):

- This accident was probably caused by the muddy conditions or the hole in the road.
- Muddy roads made driving difficult.
- Speed limits at this time were about 5 or 10 miles an hour. Because there is no visible damage to the car, we can assume that the driver was not traveling at a high speed.
- The accident drew a crowd because cars – and car accidents – were new curiosities.
- The three clues are: leaves on the ground, people wearing jackets, and children carrying books.
- This photograph was taken because car accidents were newsworthy and interesting to curious passersby. The driver may have taken the photo to document the accident for insurance purposes.
- The photograph shows what streets and cars were like in the past.

History Mystery (back cover):

The wagon that has both Goldie and Rosie stumped is a street sprinkler. When roads were made of dirt instead of pavement, they needed to be sprayed with water to keep the dust from blowing all over town. Compare that wagon to the modern street sweeper shown in the photo above. What do you think would happen if you drove this machine down an 1800s main street? Send your answer to *The Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, Iowa 52440, and we'll send you a free prize! Be sure to tell us your name, address, age, and grade in school.

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The Roost

JUST THINK OF ALL THE GREAT PARADES THERE WERE ON MAIN STREET.
MAIN STREET
DRUMS POUNDED AND TRUMPETS SOUNDED.
HORSES PRANCED AND DANCERS DANCED.
CLOWNS PLAYED AND ELEPHANTS SWAYED.
LOCAL OFFICIALS WAVED AT THE CROWDS.
AS GIANT BALLOONS TOUCHED THE CLOUDS.
AND MAGNIFICENT FLOATS MOVED SLOWLY ALONG.
IONA
AND THEN THE CROWDS SCREAMED WHEN OUT JUMPED KING KONG!
WHAT?!
WELL... IT RHYMES DOESN'T IT?

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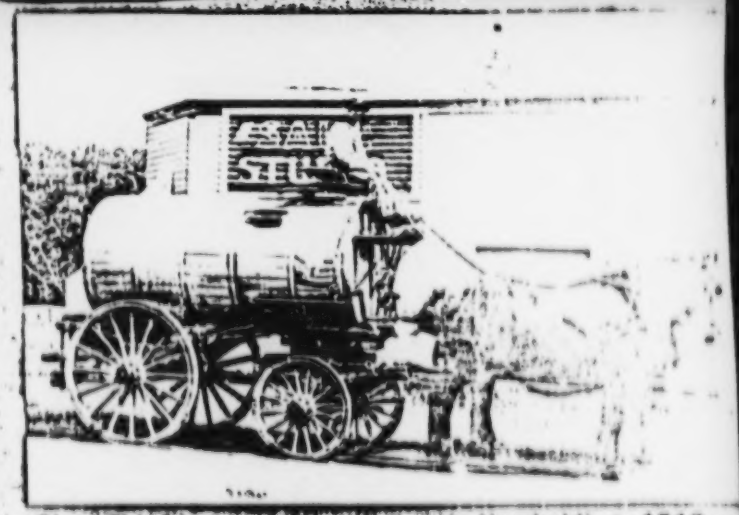
History Mystery

by Julie Seidler

ROSIE: Hey Goldie! What do you suppose is in that tank wagon driving along Main Street?

GOLDIE: I don't know, Rosie. Maybe the driver is delivering milk or something.

What do YOU think the wagon is doing? Hint: It's not what Goldie thinks! Turn to page 30 for the answer.



Clue: This photograph was taken in Humboldt, c. 1910. The sign hanging on the side of the wagon may be an advertisement for Old Dutch Cleanser, a product that is still manufactured and sold today.

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